



News About Tennessee's System of Care for Children With Serious Emotional Disturbance and Their Families



"The reality is that the mental health system looks more like a maze than a coordinated system". New Freedom

Welcome to **CONNECTIONS**, a newsletter to facilitate improvement in the Tennessee service system for children who are experiencing emotional difficulties. Over the past twenty-five years, the children's mental health system in Tennessee has expanded and improved. More children are accessing more appropriate services than ever before. However, despite our progress we are still wrestling with some of the same problems that plagued the system twenty-five years ago. The current system lacks coordination among agencies. Often services are not delivered until the child is in grave difficulty. At best, parents and caregivers play a minor role in planning and evaluating the services that their child receives.

Research, as well as the anecdotal experiences of professionals, families and children, has demonstrated that services are most effective when they are matched to a child's need, are provided at the earliest opportunity, in the right amount, are coordinated with other needed services and include family participation. These are the main issues that we will highlight in the **CONNECTIONS** newsletter.

CONNECTIONS will include child and family stories describing their experience with the children's service system. These stories will help us understand what children and their families need. Highlights will celebrate the achievements of service providers that are incorporating system of care values and principles. **CONNECTIONS** will also provide information for policy discussion and system accountability. As new strategies are tried, we will share achievements and learning opportunities so that communities can learn from one another.

Terms such as *system of care*, *child-centered*, and *wraparound* have been used to describe the kind of service system that we want for Tennessee children that have emotional difficulties. Many others have also used these terms in many different ways, which hinders clear communication. Therefore, we will endeavor to minimize jargon and discuss a system of care model endorsed by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities in ways that promote understanding by all readers.

It is hoped that the **CONNECTIONS** newsletter will facilitate new ideas for interaction and collaboration among parents, youth, service providers, teachers, advocates and government policy makers on behalf of all children and youth who are experiencing emotional difficulties and associated behavior problems.

Readers are invited to submit comments, information and ideas for future issues. Your comments will improve the quality and content of the newsletter.



The Keys To A System Of Care

There are growing networks across Tennessee that are attempting to improve the children's mental health system through the development of *systems of care*. A system of care is a wide range of mental health and related services and supports organized to work together to provide care. A system of care is designed to help a child with serious emotional disturbance and his/her family get the services they need near their home.

Sometimes a system of care is confused with a continuum of care, the latter being an assortment of services at varying levels of intensity. A system of care includes not only a variety of services at different levels of intensity but, also policies, procedures and funding mechanisms that ensure that services are provided in a coordinated manner.

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Keys cont.

It also includes informal resources such as mentoring and tutor services.

Definitions of Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)

- Child or adolescent birth to age 18
- Currently or anytime during the past year has a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder to meet DSM-IV diagnostic criteria
- Functional impairment substantially interferes with family, school, or community activities
- Excludes DSM-IV codes for substance abuse and developmental disorders unless they co-occur with another diagnosable mental illness.

A system of care represents a philosophy about the way services should be provided. The following values and principles describe the philosophy of a system of care.

CORE VALUES

⇒ A system of care should be:

- ⇒ Child-centered and family focused, and family driven;
- ⇒ Community-based and
- ⇒ Culturally competent and responsive.

PRINCIPLES

Children with SED should

- ⇒ Have access to a comprehensive array of physical, behavioral and educational services.
- ⇒ Receive individualized services in accordance with their own needs and strengths.
- ⇒ Receive services in the least restrictive, most natural environment possible.
- ⇒ Have smooth transition between the child and adult service system.
- ⇒ Have rights that are protected and have access to advocacy.
- ⇒ Have access to early identification and treatment.
- ⇒ Be assured that their families are full partners in planning, delivering and evaluating services.
- ⇒ Obtain integrated services with linkages between service providers for service planning and delivery.
- ⇒ Have case management and service coordination.



The Tennessee initiative to develop systems of care promotes a system that works hand-in-hand with our families, focusing on the unique strengths, values and culture of each child and family. Tennessee's system of care promotes local organizations to work in teams with families as critical partners to provide a full range of services to children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances.

In upcoming issues we will look more closely at what the values and principles of a system of care mean in everyday practice of providing services to children and their families.

Service Highlights

In 1999, the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities received a grant from the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). This grant was used to fund a demonstration project, the Nashville Connection, to exemplify the positive impact of a system of care philosophy. This project was designed to change the way that Tennessee's service systems respond to children with mental health needs.

The Nashville Connection began serving children and their families in October 2000. The project includes a partnership between Tennessee Voices for Children, Centerstone, Inc. and Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies. Other local and state agencies work with the Nashville Connection to serve families.

**"No one should be needing to play hide and seek to locate appropriate mental health treatment while watching a relative deteriorate."
Parent, New Freedom Commission**

The Nashville Connection is more than a way to provide services and funding for children with SED and their families. It is a way to reorganize the way that the service system plans, funds, delivers and evaluates the services that are provided for these children. Children should be served in their home community. To make this change happen, the project has:

- Taught families to identify their natural supports and resources so that family, friends and community are an important part of each child's service plan.
- Begun the process of building partnerships among families, schoolteachers, service providers and others in the community so that services are integrated and coordinated.
- Promoted awareness and development of cultural competence in the system of care. By this we mean, providing, acknowledging, accepting and respecting the culture and values of each child and their family
- Provided system of care training to all partners, agencies and parents.

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Highlights cont.

- Promoted the use of a single service plan for a child involved with multiple agencies to simplify the process for families, to maximize funding resources, and to promote interagency collaboration.
- Promoted decision making based on continuous evaluation and data collection.

**" Stigma leads to isolation and discourages people from seeking the treatment they need ".
President George W. Bush, 2002**

In redesigning the way we serve children with SED in Nashville/Davidson County, we hope to strengthen our neighborhoods and community, provide much needed support to our schools, reduce out of home placement for children with SED, and to be more efficient and effective in managing service dollars.

The results of the Nashville Connection have been quite promising and have demonstrated the benefits of a system of care. The following outcomes highlight this:

- 100% of all enrolled children have been assisted in staying in a formal school setting.
- School suspensions have been reduced by 32%.
- 53% of the caregivers reported increased school attendance
- 37% of the children improved their grade average
- 60% of the children showed a significant reduction in clinical symptoms such as depression and anxiety
- Families who completed a 6-month follow-up interview reported less overall stress.

There are two unique program components for the Nashville Connection. The first is the use of Family Service Coordinators (FSC). An FSC is a family advocate who typically is a family member who has a child or a family member who has received mental health service. FSC's coordinate service, assists the family in "navigating" the system and provides the leadership for the collaborative process of inter-agency service planning

The second component is the School Based Mental Health Liaisons (SBMHL). The liaison is a child advocate with mental health expertise and training who provides mental health education and supports the classroom teacher for each child served in the project.

The Nashville Connection project is demonstrating that systems of care work, positive outcomes are achieved and systems of care are feasible in each Tennessee community.

Online Resources about Children's Mental Health

National Technical Assistance Partnership

www.air.org/tapartnership

KEN Mental Health Information

www.mentalhealth.org

National Information Center for Children and Youth

www.nichcy.org

About Our Kids

www.aboutourkids.org

Child Welfare League of America

www.cwla.org

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

www.ffcmh.org

National Mental Health Association

www.nmha.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill

www.nami.org



Promote Systems of Care in Tennessee



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CONNECTIONS is a tri-yearly newsletter published by the state of Tennessee for the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities initiative to promote systems of care in every Tennessee community.

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